

# Career Counseling With Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Persons: The Next Decade

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The author, on the basis of an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature as well as the relevant opportunities and threats, proposes future directions for career counseling with lesbian, gay male, bisexual male and female, and transgendered persons. Suggestions include efforts for theory development, empirical research, career assessment, counseling practice, and counselor education.

Whereas Tyler (1978) criticized the vocational behavior literature for concentrating on middle-class men, Fitzgerald, Fassinger, and Betz (1995) asserted that the study of women's career development was probably the most active and vibrant area of vocational psychology research and theory from the 1970s to the early 1990s. The past decade has witnessed another significant advance in this literature, namely attention to the vocational behavior of lesbian, gay male, and bisexual male and female (LGB) persons. This new development is a response to the historical ignorance regarding sexual orientation and the heterosexual assumptions in career theories and research. Whereas the other articles in this special issue on the future of career counseling take a broad perspective, I concentrate on cutting-edge developments regarding the impact of sexual orientation on vocational behavior.

A number of conceptual and practical articles about the career development of LGB persons began to emerge in the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g., Elliott, 1993; Hetherington, Hillerbrand, & Etringer, 1989; Hetherington & Orzek, 1989), followed by theoretical and empirical work (e.g., Bieschke & Matthews, 1996; Chung, 2001; Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). Special issues on this topic appeared in *The Career Development Quarterly* (Pope, 1995b) and the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (Croteau & Bieschke, 1996). Comprehensive reviews of this literature were provided by Croteau (1996); Croteau, Anderson, DiStefano, and Kampak-Koches (2000); and Chung (2003). Building on these reviews, I discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature, as well as relevant opportunities and threats that I have identified, regarding the direction of career counseling with LGB persons in the next decade.

A recent political trend in society at large, as well as in professional organizations, is the inclusion of transgendered people in the LGB movement. Transgendered persons are broadly defined in this article as (a) persons whose gender identity or behavior deviates significantly from what traditional culture deems appropriate for their biological sex at birth or (b) persons who

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have ambiguous or multisex genitalia. This definition includes transvestites and transgenderists (part-time and full-time cross-dressers), transexuals (both before and after sex-reassignment operations), and androgynous and intersex (ambiguous or multisex) persons (Carroll & Gilroy, 2002; Gainor, 2000).

The issue of adding a *T* (for transgendered) to LGB is somewhat controversial. Opponents to inclusion argue that LGB is about sexual orientation (a person's affective and sexual desires for people of the two sexes; Chung & Katayama, 1996), whereas *transgenderism* is about gender identity (a person's self-identification as male or female in self-concept or behavior). They claim that these are two distinct constructs and should not be confused with each other. Furthermore, transgendered people are not widely accepted, or may be discriminated against, in the LGB community (Gainor, 2000). On the other hand, in recent years an increasing number of LGB organizations have moved toward the direction of inclusiveness. Recognizing the significant contributions of transgendered people in the LGB movement since the Stonewall event in 1969, as well as the historical, cultural, political, and psychological interrelatedness between the two communities (Gainor, 2000), proponents of inclusion argue that transgendered people are an integral part of the LGB community. Acknowledging the differences and interrelatedness between sexual orientation and gender identity, I include transgender issues in the analysis of literature and proposal for future directions.

## Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing Literature

### Strengths

*Theory development.* One promising aspect of this emerging literature on LGB issues is the efforts by scholars to explore LGB vocational behavior through theoretical frameworks. Three strategies have been used in theoretical advances. First, traditional vocational theories, such as Holland's theory (Mobley & Slaney, 1996), Super's theory (Dunkle, 1996), sociocognitive career theory (Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996), and vocational psychology of women (Fassinger, 1996), were examined regarding their application to LGB individuals. Second, avocational theoretical models for LGB persons were linked to their vocational behavior, such as the relevance of gay male identity development (Prince, 1995) and lesbian identity development (Fassinger, 1995; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Third, special theoretical frameworks were proposed to describe the vocational behavior of LGB persons, such as sexual identity disclosure and management (Badgett, 1996; Griffin, 1992), work discrimination (Chung, 2001; Levine & Leonard, 1984), and discrimination coping strategies (Chung, 2001).

Future efforts may integrate the aforementioned three approaches to theoretical advances. Such integrative approaches may facilitate a more holistic understanding of LGBT individuals that attends to the interaction between (a) the avocational and vocational self and (b) vocational issues/applications directly or indirectly related to a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. For example, a theory may address how a lesbian's sexual identity development and perception of work discrimination jointly affect her discrimination coping strategies and how sociocognitive career theory may be used to facilitate this process. Furthermore, scholars may delineate theoretical interactions among sexual orientation, gender identity, and other identi-



ties such as race and social class (e.g., Badgett, 1996). Such work will promote a better understanding of the complexity between multiple identities and vocational behavior.

*Empirical research.* An increasing number of empirical studies on LGB vocational behavior have been published in the past decade. Although methodological issues of this literature have been critiqued (e.g., Chung, 1995; Croteau, 1996; Lonborg & Phillips, 1996), recent studies have shown improved methodology and were published in prominent counseling journals (e.g., Nauta, Saucier, & Woodard, 2001; Rostosky & Riggle, 2002; Waldo, 1999). Croteau et al.'s (2000) review provides an excellent summary of previous accomplishments as well as future directions. Two suggestions are offered here for research in the next decade.

First, although some existing studies involved testing of hypotheses, more theory-based research is needed to validate and expand on theoretical models. Recent theoretical advances provide a good foundation for empirical research in the next decade. For example, Anderson, Croteau, Chung, and DiStefano (2001) developed an instrument to assess sexual identity management strategies based on Griffin's (1992) model. Another project is currently underway to validate Chung's (2001) models of work discrimination and coping strategies, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Second, with the exception of a few scholars who routinely conduct research in this area, most authors do not publish more than one article in this field. The advancement of this field depends on (a) individual scholars pursuing programmatic research and (b) collaborations among scholars, either as coinvestigators or by building on each other's program of research. To accomplish this goal, mentoring and interdisciplinary collaborations are encouraged.

*Guidelines for practice.* Literature on LGBT vocational behavior began with conceptual treatises for career counseling that were based on authors' experiences, observations, and speculations. During the past decade, a number of practical articles, building on advancements in theory and research (e.g., Chojnacki & Gelberg, 1994; Herring, 1998; Pope, 1995a), have been published. On the basis of the existing literature and the relevant guidelines approved by the American Psychological Association, Chung (2003) has provided a comprehensive review of competency areas (attitudes/awareness, knowledge, and skills) for career assessment and counseling with LGB clients. Now career counselors have more resources available for providing LGBT clients ethical and effective career services.

In the next decade, scholars might continue to refine practice guidelines based on the newer theories and research available. Instruments might be developed for assessing career counselors' self-efficacy and competency with LGBT clients. One additional suggestion is to become an advocate in career services. Increasing emphasis has been placed on the role of advocacy for counselors, and it is particularly relevant to LGBT clients because of the oppression and discrimination they encounter (Carroll & Gilroy, 2002). Career counselors are encouraged to advocate for LGBT issues in their local communities, at state and federal levels, and in professional organizations.

### **Weaknesses**

*Lesbian issues.* Although conceptual and theoretical articles generally address issues pertaining to both gay men and lesbians, lesbians are still

underrepresented in empirical research. For example, researchers have examined gay men's vocational aspirations and interests (Chung & Harmon, 1994; Whitam, 1983), whereas the literature on the vocational preferences of lesbians is still speculative. In the past few years, more authors have researched lesbian issues specifically (e.g., Boatwright, Gilbert, Forrest, & Ketzenberger, 1996; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996) or have included both gay men and lesbians in their studies (e.g., Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). A balanced treatment of lesbian and gay issues is encouraged in future efforts.

*Bisexual issues.* The unique vocational issues for bisexual persons are almost totally ignored in this literature. Although many articles included the term *bisexual* in their titles and terminology, there is a lack of substantive treatment on this topic. When bisexual issues were specifically addressed, the discussions were limited to how the presented theory or data might not apply to bisexual persons, rather than about what actually does apply. Furthermore, empirical research on bisexual persons' vocational behavior is nonexistent. In the next decade, scholars are encouraged to engage in additional theoretical and empirical work about the vocational behavior of bisexual persons.

*Transgender issues.* Virtually nothing is available in the vocational literature about transgendered persons. Consequently, there is no theoretical, empirical, or practical literature to guide career counseling with this population. Although many issues pertaining to transgendered persons may be similar to those for LGB persons (e.g., identity development, coming out, vocational stereotypes, oppression, discrimination), there are also unique issues facing transgendered individuals (e.g., discrimination by LGB persons and career counselors, impact of cross-dressing or sex-change procedures on vocational status and adjustment, legal status as male or female). It seems that transgendered persons may encounter a great deal of vocational choice and adjustment issues, yet career counselors have little information about these issues. In addition to ignorance, career counselors may also need to deal with their own stereotypes, discomfort, and biases regarding transgendered persons. Even the American Psychiatric Association (1994) still considers transgenderism as some form of pathology (i.e., gender identity disorder and transvestic fetishism). In the next decade, much is needed to address vocational issues of transgendered persons through conceptual, theoretical, empirical, practical, and advocacy efforts.

*Career assessment.* Assessment is integral to career counseling and research. Several articles have addressed career assessment issues with LGB persons (Chung, 2003; Pope, Prince, & Mitchell, 2000; Prince, 1997). A general consensus is that researchers and counselors need to be careful when selecting and applying traditional career assessment instruments with LGB persons because of reliability and validity concerns. Furthermore, few sound instruments exist for assessing constructs specifically relevant to the vocational behavior of LGBT individuals (e.g., identity development, degree of "outness," discrimination coping strategies). The use of "homemade" measures without supportive psychometric data contributes to difficulties of interpreting and integrating various research findings. Recently, several instruments have been developed for career assessment with LGB individuals (e.g., Anderson et al., 2001; Waldo, 1999). However, a majority



of the constructs identified by Chung (2003) as relevant to LGB persons remain without any formal assessment instrument available for use. Efforts in the next decade might target these variables, as well as identifying additional constructs that are relevant to transgendered persons.

**Counselor training.** Research has found that psychology students often feel unprepared because of inadequate training to work effectively with LGB clients (Allison, Crawford, Echemendia, Robinson, & Knepp, 1994; Buhrke, 1989; Pilkington & Cantor, 1996). Although recent career counseling textbooks have included discussions of LGBT career issues (e.g., Brown, 2003; Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2003; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2002; Zunker, 2002), most textbooks' coverage of this topic is limited, insufficient, or outdated, especially regarding bisexual and transgender career development. Future research might explore how career counseling for LGBT clients is addressed in counselor education programs. Bieschke and Matthews (1996) identified several factors that were predictive of LGB-affirmative career counseling attitudes and behaviors. Developmental models of LGBT-affirmative career counselors have also been proposed (Gelberg & Chojnacki, 1995; Worthington, McCrary, & Howard, 1998). Furthermore, Chung (2003) has provided some guidelines for enhancing training in LGB career assessment and counseling. Future efforts are needed to implement and evaluate these models and training programs.

## Opportunities for and Threats to Career Counseling for LGBT Persons

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### Opportunities

**Human rights movement.** Recent history has witnessed a global human rights movement for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. An increasing number of employers in public and private sectors are adopting antidiscrimination and domestic partner benefit policies (Badgett, 1996; Gainor, 2000). Although extremely discriminatory toward LGBT persons, even the U.S. military has taken a minor step forward by adopting a "don't ask, don't tell" policy. More than ever, vocational issues that LGBT persons face are receiving attention from politicians, the media, economists, sociologists, social scientists, counselors, and society at large. Some grant-awarding agencies, such as the American Psychological Foundation, have identified LGBT vocational concerns and discrimination as one major focus. The International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy was initiated in 1992 to address legal and vocational issues for transgendered persons (Lombardi, 1999). More opportunities and resources are expected to be available in the next decade for career development for LGBT individuals. Armed with special training in career development and life planning, counselors and counseling psychologists are in a unique position to further this movement by promoting advancements in theory, research, and practice for career counseling with LGBT individuals.

**Inclusive movement.** Although an increasing number of LGB organizations in society at large are including transgenderism in their names and missions, professional counseling organizations have been slower to participate in that inclusive movement. Neither the American Counseling Association (ACA) nor the American Psychological Association (APA)

has a division that specifically addresses transgender issues. The Association for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues in Counseling, a division of ACA, has included transgender issues in its mission statement and goals. However, the word *transgendered* is not yet included in the name of the association. The same is true for the Section for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Awareness (SLGBA) within APA Division 17 (Counseling Psychology). Over the past few years, APA Division 44 (Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues) has begun to explore the issue of including transgenderism in its mission and goals. A transgender task force was formed within the division and transgender convention programs have been organized.

Although transgenderism is included in some of the aforementioned organizations' mission statements and goals, the noninclusive names of the organizations and a lack of initiatives on transgender issues indicate a need for more efforts in this inclusive movement. Carroll and Gilroy (2002) suggested that mental health professionals were often guilty of paying only lip service to the T in LGBT. Name changes, strategic plans, and concrete actions are necessary for promoting awareness, scholarship, and practice related to career counseling with transgendered persons. One example is that during the 2002 APA Convention, the SLGBA discussed a plan to put together a Web page and a special journal issue on career development and counseling for LGB persons. In keeping with the movement toward inclusiveness, this project may be expanded to include transgender vocational issues.

### Threats

*Economic depression.* The global economic depression in the past few years, heightened by terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, poses unique vocational concerns for LGBT persons. When being laid off or facing reduced income and employee benefits, individuals often need to depend on their employed partners' financial support and spouse/partner benefits such as health care insurance. However, compared with married couples who are heterosexual, unemployed LGBT persons with same-sex partners are less likely to be able to rely on their partners' domestic partner benefits. Furthermore, whereas unemployed heterosexual persons may seek support from family and extended family members, such support may not be available to some LGBT persons because of conflicts concerning their sexual orientation or gender identity. Career counselors need to help LGBT persons secure support and resources when facing the effects of an economic depression.

*HIV.* Gay men, bisexual men and women, and transgendered (GBT) individuals continue to have some of the highest rates of HIV infection in the United States, although recently there has been a decrease in the percentage of new HIV cases among these populations compared with the increasing percentage of new HIV cases among heterosexual men and women (Herek & Capitanio, 1999). The latest medical advancements have helped many HIV-positive persons to live longer, contributing to a change in attitude, which now views HIV as a chronic disease rather than a terminal illness. Unfortunately, there is still no cure for HIV, leaving a large number of GBT persons living with HIV for an extended period of time. Many remain active workers, whereas others



face a struggle between work and their health; both situations present special challenges for career counselors. LGBT persons who are infected with HIV may face discrimination on multiple levels in the workplace because of their HIV status and sexual orientation or gender identity, even though individuals with HIV may be protected by laws against discriminating against people on the basis of a disability. Furthermore, HIV has a tremendous impact on the infected worker, employer, work setting, and those who provide care for the infected worker (Hoffman, 1997). However, the interactions between HIV and sexual orientation or gender identity and their impact on a person's vocational behavior remain largely ignored in the career counseling literature. In the next decade, scholars and practitioners are encouraged to invest in theoretical development, research, and practice regarding HIV and employment issues among LGBT workers.

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## Conclusion

On the basis of an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature on career counseling with LGBT individuals and taking into account the relevant opportunities and threats to career counseling with LGBT clients, I have proposed a number of future directions that researchers and practitioners in the field of career counseling might pursue in the next decade regarding LGBT issues. These suggestions include efforts for theory development, empirical research, career assessment, counseling practice, and counselor education. I emphasize attending to vocational issues that face all LGBT people, but especially lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons. Finally, counselors need to assist LGBT persons in coping with the current threats of economic depression and HIV.

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